R E P O R T R E S U M E S

ED 011 816 RE 000 129

READING GROUP PLACEMENT--ITS INFLUENCE ON ENJOYMENT OF READING AND PERCEPTION OF SELF AS A READER.

BY- LASSWELL, ANNE

AMERICAN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH ASSOCIATION, WASH., D. C.

PUB DATE 18 FEB 67

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.09 HC-$0.64 16P.

DESCRIPTORS- *READING RESEARCH, *PRIMARY GRADES, *ABILITY GROUPING, *SELF CONCEPT, *STUDENT ATTITUDES, QUESTION ANSWER INTERVIEWS, BEGINNING READING, GROUP READING, READING LEVEL, CORVALLIS

IN AN EFFORT TO CLARIFY THE QUESTION OF THE VALUE OF ABILITY GROUPING, THE POSSIBLE INFLUENCE OF LEVEL OF READING GROUP PLACEMENT ON PRIMARY STUDENTS ENJOYMENT OF READING AND SELF-PERCEPTION AS READERS WAS STUDIED IN THREE RANDOMLY-SELECTED FIRST-, SECOND-, AND THIRD-GRADE CLASSROOMS IN A CORVALLIS, OREGON, SCHOOL LOCATED IN A LOWER-MIDDLE TO UPPER-MIDDLE SOCIOECONOMIC AREA. STRUCTURED INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS WERE HELD WITH ALL PUPILS IN THE THREE CLASSES IN SEPTEMBER, 1966 (N=71) AND JANUARY, 1967 (N=64) TO DETERMINE (1) IF PRIMARY CHILDREN PERCEIVE THE LEVEL OF THEIR READING GROUP PLACEMENT, (2) IF ACCURACY OF PERCEPTION INCREASES AS CHILDREN ADVANCE THROUGH THE GRADES, (3) IF ACCURACY OF PERCEPTION OF PLACEMENT IS RELATED TO LEVEL, (4) IF CHILDREN IN HIGH READING GROUPS REPORT GREATER ENJOYMENT OF READING THAN CHILDREN IN LOW READING GROUPS, AND (5) IF CHILDREN WHO HAVE ACCURATELY PERCEIVED THEIR PLACEMENT LEVEL REPORT MORE ENJOYMENT OF READING THAN THOSE WHO OVER-ESTIMATE OR UNDER-ESTIMATE THEIR PLACEMENT. NO CLEAR-CUT EVIDENCE WAS FOUND TO SUPPORT EITHER PROPONENTS OR OPPONENTS OF ABILITY GROUPING AS THE METHOD OF ORGANIZING FOR PRIMARY GRADE READING INSTRUCTION, ALTHOUGH CERTAIN TRENDS IN ACCURACY OF PERCEPTION OF READING PLACEMENT WERE NOTED. TABLES AND REFERENCES ARE INCLUDED. THIS PAPER WAS PRESENTED TO THE AMERICAN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE (NEW YORK CITY, FEBURARY 18, 1967). (LS)

ED011816

READING GROUP PLACEMENT: ITS INFLUENCE ON ENJOYMENT OF READING AND PERCEPTION OF SELF AS A READER*

Anne Lasswell

Oregon State University
Corvallis, Oregon 97331

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

BACKGROUND

Ability grouping for reading instruction in the elementary school is a common practice. According to Spache (1), the most common type of ability grouping encountered in the elementary school is the division of pupils into three reading groups based on reading levels. Theoretically speaking, the primary purpose of such grouping is to promote differentiation of instruction according to pupils' individual needs and abilities.

Proponents of this pattern of grouping generally feel that division of a class into three groups for reading instruction provides sub-groups of a reasonable size, and diminishes the range of reading abilities which teachers must plan for and deal with in most teaching situations.

Opponents of this pattern offer the criticism that planning for three different levels of reading instruction will not adequately meet the needs of all class members and that each group in this type of arrangement will still contain children

RE 000 129

*Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New York City, February 18, 1967.

varying widely in abilities and interests. Veatch (2) states: "There is, in truth, no such thing as a homogeneous group. It is impossible to find more than one child exactly like another on ANY general measure. The practice of having slow, middle, and bright groups on the thought that such children are close enough for teaching purposes is a fiction. Suffice it to say here that irreparable harm has been done children, the least of which is a rather universal dislike of reading."

Macdonald et al. (3) question whether ability grouping, as conceived and executed, produces a true group in the psycho-sociological sense that its members choose to work together for a common purpose. They argue that the ability group context is an artificial competitive situation which deliberately invites the immature appraisal and judgment of the performance of selves and others in the peer group context. In such a situation, they continue, few will perceive success at a level commensurate with their desires to be approved and attain mastery.

A sampling from the literature on ability grouping for reading instruction thus reveals a lack of agreement on its desirability as the means for structuring the instructional relationship. In particular, concern for the possible influence of ability grouping on pupils' psychological development has been registered.

OBJECTIVES

The present research project was conceived as a pilot study to explore the possible influence of level of reading group placement on two important variables -- enjoyment of reading and perception of self as a reader.

Answers were sought to the following questions:

1. Do children in the primary grades accurately perceive the level of their reading group placement?

2. Does accuracy of perception of reading group placement increase as children advance through the primary grades?

3. Is accuracy of perception of reading group placement related to level of group placement?

4. Will children in the high reading groups report greater enjoyment of reading than children in the low reading groups?

5. Will children whose perceived level of group placement is consistent with their actual placement report greater enjoyment of reading than children who over-estimate or under-estimate their placement?

PROCEDURE

Structured individual interviews with all pupils (N=71) in a randomly-selected classroom representing each of the first, second and third grades in one school in the Corvallis, Oregon School District were conducted by the investigator in September, 1966. The school selected for the study serves a population which represents lower-middle to upper-middle socio-economic backgrounds.

During the interview, the child was asked to respond to five questions. The first question ("What is your favorite color?") was intended to serve as a sort of introduction to the purpose of the interview ("finding out how you feel about some things"). The second and third questions - "How do you like bananas?" and "How do you like reading?" were presented to the child in a forced-choice situation. A sheet of paper on which were arranged three squares of decreasing size was shown to the child. The words "very much" were written on the largest square, "a little bit" on the smallest square and "in between" on the middle-sized square. Free space was available at either end of the scale. The child was asked to point to the box which best indicated the way he felt in answer to the questions.

For question four, the interviewee was shown a sheet of paper with "My Class" written at the top and with as many blank lines on it as there were children in his room. The list was divided in three sub-groups, with as many lines for names in each group as there were actual group members in that group in that room. The following question was then asked by the interviewer: "If all the boys and girls in your room were on a list like this, with the names of the best readers on the top lines and the names of the poorest readers on the bottom lines, point to show me which line you think your name would be on."

The interview was concluded with the question "What would you like to be when you grow up?" in an attempt to allay any anxiety which questions three and four might have produced.

The same interview was repeated with each child from the original sample who was still attending the school in January, 1967 (N = 64).

Pupils' responses to questions three and four of the interviews and information about actual level of reading group placement in September and January as obtained from classroom teachers comprised the data used in the analysis.

RESULTS

Do children in the primary grades accurately perceive the level of their reading group placement?

Thirty-five per cent of the first, second and third graders interviewed in September accurately reported the level of their group placement in reading (High, Middle or Low). A slight increase in accuracy of perception of reading group placement was noted in January, with 43% of the sample indicating the actual level of their group placement.

During the interim between September and January interviews, seven Ss (11% of the total sample) actually moved from one reading group level to another. Of these, five maintained the same perception of their reading level and actually moved in that direction, one maintained the same perception while actually moving farther from it and one changed his perception in exact accordance with his move.

Does accuracy of perception of reading group placement increase as children advance through the primary grades?

A tendency toward increased accuracy from first to second grades was noted, with 29% of all first graders accurately reporting level of group placement while 37% of both the second and third graders reported a perceived level of group placement which agreed with their actual level of placement.

By January, 40% of all first graders, 48% of all second graders and 43% of all third graders were reporting a perceived level of group placement which agreed with their actual placement.

Is accuracy of perception of reading group placement related to level of group placement?

The number of members in each of the three reading ability groups (grades 1, 2 and 3 combined) whose actual group placement (1) agreed with their perceived group placement or (2) disagreed with their perceived group placement was calculated. These data were then analyzed, employing Chi square as the test of significance.

Results of the September analysis, as shown in Table 1, revealed a significantly higher number of agreements between perceived and actual group placement in high group members than in members of middle and lower groups.

TABLE I

Frequency of agreement between perceived and actual group Placement by High, Middle and Low reading ability group members, September, 1966

Perceived Placement and Actual Placement	High Group		Middle Group		Low Group	
Agree	18	(9)*	4	(9)	3	(7)
Disagree	7	(16)	21	(16)	18	(14)

$X^2 = 21.81$

$p = < .001$, $df = 2$

* expected cell frequency

TABLE 2

Frequency of agreement between perceived and actual group placement by High, Middle and Low reading ability group members, January, 1967

Perceived Placement and Actual Placement	High Group		Middle Group		Low Group	
Agree	18	(11)	7	(10)	3	(7)
Disagree	7	(14)	16	(13)	13	(9)

$X^2 = 13.59$

$p = < 01$, $df = 2$

Results of the January analysis, as shown in Table 2, revealed a similar response pattern, with the number of agreements between perceived and actual group placement again being significantly greater for high group members than middle and low group members.

The above findings suggest that accuracy of self-reported perception of reading group placement is significantly related to actual level of reading group placement for this sample of primary grade children, with a significantly greater number of high reading group members accurately reporting the level of their reading group placement than middle or low reading group members.

Will children in the high reading groups report greater enjoyment of reading than children in the low reading groups?

The number of members in each level of reading group placement (high, middle and low) who responded to the question "How do you like reading?" with each of the three possible responses ("very much", "a little bit", or "in between") was calculated. These data were then subjected to a series of Chi square analyses.

Results of the September analysis, as shown in Table 3, suggest that, at the beginning of the school year, high reading group members in grades 1, 2, and 3 tended to report greater enjoyment of reading than middle and low reading group members, although the difference was not significant.

TABLE 3

Frequency of response by High, Middle and Low reading ability group members when categorized by level of reported enjoyment of reading, September, 1966.

Reading Ability Group Placement	Reported Enjoyment of Reading		
	Very Much	In Between	A Little Bit
High	18 (12.5)	5 (8.5)	2 (4)
Middle	10 (12.5)	11 (8.5)	4 (4)
Low	8 (11)	8 (7)	5 (3)

$X^2 = 7.79$

$p = <.10$, $df = 4$

Separate analyses by grade level suggested that reported enjoyment of reading at the beginning of the school year is independent of placement in high, middle or low reading ability groups at the first and second grade levels. However, for grade three, a significant relationship ($X^2 = 12.70$, $p = <.02$) between the two variables was found, with members of the high group reporting much greater enjoyment of reading than average or low group members.

At Mid-year, however, as Table 4 indicates, analysis of the total sample's responses revealed no significant relationship between actual level of group placement and reported enjoyment of reading. Similarly, no significant differences were found when each of the grades was considered individually.

TABLE 4

Frequency of response by High, Middle and Low reading ability group members when categorized by level of reported enjoyment of reading, January 1967.

Reading Ability Group Placement	Reported Enjoyment of Reading					
	Very Much		In Between		A Little Bit	
High	19	(17)	5	(6)	1	(2)
Middle	14	(16)	7	(5)	2	(2)
Low	11	(11)	3	(4)	2	(1)

$X^2 = 3.20$

$p = < .70$, $df = 4$

Thus, an initially observed tendency for high reading group members, especially at the third grade level, to report greater enjoyment of reading disappeared for the sample by mid-year.

Will children whose perceived level of reading group placement is consistent with their actual placement report greater enjoyment of reading than children who over-estimate or under-estimate their placement?

The number of Ss who responded "very much", "in between" or "a little bit" in answer to the question "How do you like reading?" were categorized by group and according to (1) agreement between perceived and actual group placement or (2) disagreement. Only those 64 Ss who participated in both September and January interviews were considered in this phase of the analysis.

Results of separate Chi square analyses on September and January data revealed that extent of reported enjoyment of reading was independent of agreement or disagreement between perceived and actual group placement for this sample.

Frequency of (1) agreement between perceived and actual group placement, (2) under-estimation and (3) over-estimation as categorized by level of actual group placement and reported enjoyment of reading as of January 1967 is presented in summary form in Table 5 for the reader's information.

TABLE 5

Frequency of agreement between perceived and actual group placement, under-estimation and over-estimation as categorized by level of actual group placement and reported enjoyment of reading.

Perceived Placement and Actual Placement	Reported Enjoyment of Reading		
	Very Much	In Between	A Little Bit
Agree			
High Group	60%	12%	---
Middle Group	13%	13%	4 1/4%
Low Group	12%	---	6 1/2%
Over-Estimate			
Middle Group	39%	4 1/4%	4 1/4%
Low Group	56%	19%	6 1/2%
Under-Estimate			
High Group	20%	4%	4%
Middle Group	9%	9%	4 1/4%

As can be seen, a majority of high reading group members' perceived and actual placement agreed and they tended to report enjoying reading "very much." Over-estimation of level of group placement may have been responsible for 39% of all middle group members' and 56% of all low group members' reports that they enjoyed reading "very much." Of course it is also very possible that factors other than those tapped in the present study influenced their reported enjoyment.

DISCUSSION

At this point it should be noted that, early in October, independent of the study, an administrative decision to organize the third grade reading instructional program around a modified Joplin Plan arrangement was made. All third graders (three classrooms) in the school were assigned to one of six reading ability groups on the basis of standardized test results. In this program each teacher is responsible for teaching two groups and students may leave their home classroom during the formal reading instruction time to go to the classroom of the teacher who is responsible for their group.

Thus, while the first and second grades maintained a three-group, within-classroom organizational pattern for reading instruction from the time of the first series of interviews to the second, the third graders' organizational pattern was changed. What effect this change had on third graders' perceptions of themselves as readers or their enjoyment of reading is

not known. In light of this information, however, it is interesting to note results of the analyses designed to answer question four. In September, third graders in the high reading group reported significantly greater enjoyment of reading than middle and low group members. In January, however, this significant difference disappeared and no clear-cut relationship between level of group placement and extent of reported enjoyment was noted.

Because opportunity for evaluation of one's own reading ability in comparison with other pupils in the home classroom was not as great for third graders in their within-grade-level organization for reading instruction as it was for first and second graders with their within-classroom organizational pattern, it is also interesting to note that the increase in accuracy of perception of actual level of placement between September and January for third graders was at least slightly less (6%) than for first (11%) or second (11%) graders.

In summary, results of this investigation fail to lend clear-cut support to either proponents or opponents of ability grouping as the method of organizing for primary grade reading instruction.

While there was a tendency toward a September to January increase in accuracy of reported perception of reading group placement, at no time did more than half of the children reporting accurately perceive their placement. Apparently the primary

grade children in this sample were not as aware of the classroom reading group hierarchy (or were not willing to report their place in it to an outsider) as some writers suggest. The tendency for high group members to report the actual level of their group placement more accurately than middle or low group members, however, suggests the possible operation of ego defense mechanisms which may have prevented the admission of perceived lower group placement.

That over-estimation of actual reading group placement occurred in association with a high ("very much") level of reported enjoyment for 46% of all low and middle group members at least suggests the possibility that perceived success in reading within any group can lead to a high level of enjoyment of reading and a favorable perception of that group's ability as a whole.

REFERENCES

1. Spache, George D. Toward Better Reading, 1963, 135.

2. Veatch, Jeannette. Reading in the Elementary School, 1966, 196.

3. Macdonald, James B., Harris, Theodore L. and Rarick, C. Lawrence. "An Experimental Study of the Group Versus the One-to-One Instructional Relationship in First Grade Basal Reading Programs," U.S. Office of Education Cooperative Research Project #2674, 1966.